

The title of the Soup Dragons' new album Hotwired (Big Life/Mercury) accurately describes their sound -- an invigorating mix of up front drums, laughing lead guitar, and joyously sarcastic vocals. Neither thrashers nor industrial bashers, this band is pop all the way, but they touch on all bases of rock mixing Hendrixy guitar with dreamy harmonies on "No More Understanding," and getting funky whenever they can, sticking in all kinds of things from strings to synthesized noises in one enthusiastic, energetic blast. Lead singer/songwriter Sean Dickson often sings in a casual whisper sort of like Lloyd Cole, but knows how to let loose at all the right moments on songs that are smart lyrically and injected with liberal doses of humor.

Openers, Catherine Wheel aren't nearly as inventive. Their latest Ferment (Fontana/Mercury) is loud and spacey with echoey dreamy vocals and wall of sound rhythm guitars. Occasionally haunting -- "Indigo Blue," and sometimes manic -- "She's My Friend" -- there's a sameness that pervades most of the songs which walk a fine line between being dirge-like, yet ethereal.

Soup Dragons with Catherine Wheel: Fri., July 3 at 7 p.m. at the Trocadero, 10th and Arch Sts., \$12.50, 336-2000.

--Peter Brown